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ABSTRACT

This paper introduces a structural model of multigenerational relationships including the adolescent-parent relationship. The model, which perceives generational role relationships as falling within a five dimensional span includes the following: (1) intra (within the same generation); (2) direct (one generation distant); (3) bi (two generations distant); (4) tri (three generations distant); and (5) combined (role relationships involving members of several generations). These dimensions are then conceptualized as existing within parallel orbits, within generational cohorts, or within hierarchical orbits, with individuals of different generations. Orbits and orbital relationships are described along with an example of orbits of role functioning within an extended nuclear family model in the movements of one individual. Role conflicts are discussed and coping strategies are explored. The Adolescent-Parent Relevance Model is introduced briefly to illustrate the connection between clarity of orbit and a corresponding clarity of appropriate role and function. The need for flexibility in this model of relative role postures is emphasized. (NRB)

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A Multigenerational Perspective On The Task Field of Parents

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This paper will introduce a structural model of multi-generational relationships including the adolescent-parent relationship. We can assume that during the period of raising young children, the parent will most likely at some point concurrently occupy roles of both parent and child. We will not deal with the special circumstances of varying social groups since the model can be flexibly extended, as circumstances of specific cultural mores and/or individual needs dictate. This model should be seen within a bed of those tasks of fusion and separation which the involved generational members must confront and resolve as they manage any accompanying inter and intragenerational conflict and stress. We perceive generational role relationships to fall within five dimensional span: 1) intra (within the same generation), 2) direct, (one generation distant), 3) bi (two generations distant), 4) tri (three generations distant) and 5) combined (role relationships involving members of several generations). These dimensions of relating and relatedness may be conceptualized as within either parallel orbits, as with husband and wife, or within hierarchical orbit as with parent and child. Parallel orbits are defined here as encompassing functions and actions of generational cohorts; hierarchical orbits encompass movements in relations to those not of the same generational cohort. This concept of parallel and hierarchical orbit may be thought of as being of horizontal or of vertical direction. The subject moves up and down the vertical scale, but follows a contained course within the horizontal direction. The fellow travelers of this horizontal (parallel) movement are together at respective stages

while the vertical scale moves between stages.

Orbits and Orbital Relationships

Identification of own orbit and the orbit of the pertinent other provides guidelines which designate role function and direction of role responsibilities, as well as rights. Intragenerational roles and responsibilities are of a different conceptual nature than those which fall in an intergenerational posture. At any one time, an individual may be relating simultaneously to others who are in both parallel and/or heirarchical orbits. Clearly, embedded across orbits or within indepently operative orbits of relationships, is potential for role strain and role diffusion with accompanying stress responses (Gross, 1958.)

An example of orbits of role functioning within an extended nuclear family model in the movements of a smoothly progressing individual might be as follows.* Jon is a 33 year old married male from an intact family of origin and with no prior marriages or children of a prior union. Jon is father to two children, son to two parents, and mate to his wife. He is also a brother to one sibling as well as son-in-law to two parents of spouse and brother-in-law to one sibiling of spouse. In this example Jon participates in three categories of parallel orbits and three categories of hierarchical as follows:

*Deviations, while not uncommon, are seen as conceptual variants and will not be dealt with in this paper.

I. Parallel Orbit (Horizontal)		
	Posture	To
A.	Husband	Wife
B.	Sibling	Sibling
C.	In-law-Sib	In-law-Sib

II. Hierarchical		Orbit
A.	Parent	Own Child
B.	Child	Own Parent
C.	In-law Child	In-law Parent

Since role can be defined as "expectations group members have for those individuals (or actors) who fall in a particular category of persons who occupy a position in a group" (Backman and Secord, p. 92), it carries both expectations and responsibilities according to the roles assumed. There is a variation of both responsibilities and/or rights--services to be rendered or services to be received relative to the specific role. Our formulation sees Jon as moving within specific "orbits of role function" in relation to others who are moving within their "orbits of role functioning" -- each moves in their respective orbit as they simultaneously may penetrate one anothers pursuant to idiosyncratic tasks and means within parallel and/or hierarchical orbit.

At times Jon functions exclusively within a parallel orbit; at times within a hierarchical orbit. It is quite possible that he will be involved in more than one subcategory of parallel orbit at a time (parallel orbits IIA and IIB.) Similarly, at any one time, he may be involved in more than one hierarchical orbit (e.g. IIA and IIC.) But,

more times than not, Jon moves simultaneously within and between both parallel and hierarchical orbits in Combined Orbit:

III. Combined Orbit (at one and the same moment)

	Posture	To
A.	Child	Own parents and/or in-law parent*
	and/or	
B.	Husband	Wife
	and/or	
C.	Brother	Sibling and/or in-law sibling**
	and/or	
D.	Parent	Child

In sum, in this example Jon may simultaneously occupy 3 parallel and 3 hierarchical orbit postures and 4 combined orbit postures, making a total of 10 possible orbital postures of role conflict.

Clearly, with the increased life span and its potential for increasing nests of relationship clusters, sources of role conflict between and within the generations multiply. Add to this the increasing conditions of family disintegration - e.g. the increasing number of marriages whose components include step parents, step children, step grandparents to be balanced with current relationships.

*These categories could have been subdivided into own parent, separated from in-law parent and own sibling as separate from in-law, making a total of 14 categories of orbit rather than ten.

**At times, Jon's relationship as spouse to spouse may alter to become sibling to sibling. Since both are children to own parents and/or in-law child, ironically, both husband and wife share the similar posture of child to parents, hence sibling to each other.

Sheer volume of relationships alone bring increased potential for role conflict and diffusion which promotes stress intragenerational - (e.g. sister and sister-in law)- as well as intergenerational - (e.g. grandparent and step grandson)-. With volume comes confusion of relative and respective roles and task responsibilities - e.g. who is to care for the invalid mother-or perhaps the father's widow (who is not the natural mother) especially since life is ever unpredictable and unexpected changes are more the role than the exception. Therefore, a model that is applicable to the volume of different possibilities must also cue in relative positions of self to others in such changing patterns. Our formulation of parallel and hierarchical orbits as orbits of interactions, serves this function and permits "within" as well as "between" orbit movement. For members with "extended nuclear" families of 3 or 4 living generations the model does not imply only interacting physically within one household, but includes relationships of psychological responsibilities.

Stable Postures, But Flexible Tasks

The issue of coping naturally surfaces. We suggest that the characteristic of flexibility may be the sole dimension of personality adequate to the task. Increasingly, as the character of traditional role relationships alter, it has been and will be necessary for the generations to flexibly move back and forth between tasks heretofore associated exclusively with either child or parent roles. Our model of generational role orbits, hierarchical and vertical, implies a simple, functional translation for use.

It structures, at any one moment in time, clarity of generational stance, allows the individual to know whether he is at that moment in a relative parallel or hierarchical posture. The task to be performed bears no relation to the generational relative posture. The posture is stable. The task is flexible. It allows for freedom to provide appropriate tasks to meet reality needs. e.g. in time of crisis with aging parents this perception of generational orbits can permit the flexibility to the younger parent generation for assumption of tasks heretofore considered the province of parent--without the inhibition wrought by dangers of cognitive confusions and discomfort of inappropriate role assumption. Similarly, in times of crisis with the developing adolescent, a clear perception of which orbit is parallel and which is hierarchical will aid the parenting generation to avoid acting as friend or sibling (a parallel orbit) and continue the role of parent the adolescent needs him to be.

The adult parent therefore has looked for affective support from individuals in parallel orbit. Hence, the affective expectancy model has been

parallel orbits -- income

hierarchical orbits -- outgo

We suggest this traditional view can be amended to include a more fluid model where, at certain points in the life span, nurturance and not just support, may also be seen as coming from a generation of parallel orbit.

The connection between clarity of orbit and a corresponding clarity of appropriate role and function can be clearly illustrated by further

reference to the young parenting generation (middle) and the adolescent child.

Adolescent Parent Relevance Model

The Adolescent - Parent Relevance Model, to be briefly introduced here reflects this philosophy.* Traditionally, nurturance has been viewed within a hierarchical generational model of parent nurtures child. The Adolescent - Relevance Model, is grounded in the assumption that the task of parenting to an adolescent is conceptually different from that of parenting younger children. With the achievement of advances in physical, mental, emotional growth to a position where the adolescent feels eager to move forth to greater independence, the parenting tasks moves forward from the active nurturance and protective postures of the parenting to young children to a life support model which includes bed and board and guidance; not protection or direction. The Adolescent Parent Relevance Model incorporated an assessment tool which asks the parent to reevaluate and update perceived functions of the parent role he/she occupies in relation to the offspring. This tool flows from the conception of nurturance necessary for continued growth and development at adolescence as centered outside the home, not in the home. The peer arena, a generational cohort of parallel orbit, is the relevant social context of nurturance.

*Presented with more detail in Adolescent Social Development: Dynamic Functional Interaction.

We suggest in this model that parents can claim a milestone in their parenting as major nurturant functions are completed, and indeed now assume a secondary support posture. Ironically, the complex structure of our Western society which the literature has often blamed for exacerbating the struggle adolescents face in finding a place for themselves and thus must seek out an interim peer group (Goodman 1956, Friedenberg 1963, Keniston 1965) can paradoxically be seen as a society which provides substitute structures freeing energies from nurturing parenting tasks at adolescence. Parents become free to utilize these energies elsewhere; perhaps to other subcategories of parallel orbits e.g. spouse, sibling or to filial responsibilities in times of crisis, or to the caretaking task of elders which the increased life span implies.

Adolescence, as distinct from other periods of the life span, has been popularly accepted as a transitional period of life confusing not only to the adolescent, but to the parent (Erikson 1950, 1968; Offer 1975). In adolescence, parents often consciously attempt to cognitively acknowledge the growth and changes they perceive in their child. They struggle with the stress of their own vascillation between yielding to the affective desire for fusion and acting on their cognitive awareness of the need for separation. This conflict is behaviorally apparent in the vascillation we observe in carrying out the parental role. The move between poles of permissiveness and rigidity, between postures of hierarchical role relationships and postures approaching pal to pal or sibling to sibling (orbits which are parallel.)

We suggest that another similar condition of vascillation is now increasingly common but, not so popularly recognized. It confronts the same generation of parents from the opposite direction -- their own parents. In relation to their own parents, young adult parents are conditioned to affectively experience themselves in hierarchical orbit, historically, and hence graphically in lower posture. Now, they vascillate in a growing discomfort, which stems from an increasing awareness that while the orbits may in fact still be hierarchical, the positions are now reversed. Most young parents, a pivotal generation highlighted in this paper, will experience transitions of roles and of expectations and responsibilities toward both children and parents. For most it will occur at some time in both directions simultaneously. A conception that reversal and/or change of task is appropriate to life span progression may provide the cognitive component essential to support the expression of the behavioral flexibility -- freed and disconnected from traditional role associations -- essential to the challenge.

Generational Orbit Model

Such a conception is offered by our Generational Orbit Model - a model of parallel and hierarchical orbits which encompasses roles and responsibilities and allows that changes occur in accord with own life stage and life stages of prior and post generations. A clear focus on the orbit of the target individual (parallel or hierarchical) brings cognitive clarity, with reduced affective interference, allowing necessary

interpersonal functions to be served with less risk of expressed or unexpressed conflicts which lead to inappropriate degrees of fusion and/or separations. Within this model, generational role need not determine the action. Hence, parents can at one time service child and at another time child can bring those same functions to parents -- or, as e.g. caring for sick or providing shelter to a grandchild to a grandparent. A cognitively clear diagram of the generational postures (graphically picturing whether others lie in parallel or hierarchical orbit) can define differences and similarities between and among generations. The model of task defined generational posture and relationship is obsolete.

This model of orbital relative posture appears to offer a viable foundation around which flexible relating can evolve. Attachments of individuals of hierarchical orbit should be considered as discontinuous and begs a revised conceptual view. Even if more intense at any one moment in time, e.g. infancy and early parenthood, this level of attachment is clearly time related and time limited. In contrary posture, attachments of individuals in parallel orbits as e.g. siblings or friends, hold more potential for continuity. This conceptual model thus allows that psychological separation between parent and child (e.g. adolescence) or even physical separation of death does not leave the individual without cornerstones since others, in parallel orbit, are perceived as the co-travelers carrying the continuous interpersonal function -- along the life span.

A Model of Relative Role Postures

In sum, our model structures a generationally based life span conception of relative role postures. It allows for temporarily based changing functions in both parallel and hierarchical orbits, intra or inter, according to the conditions of unique life conditions, roles and responsibilities. The model allows for a continuing redefinition of what these roles and responsibilities are. Cohorts generally experience parallel life span tasks although specifics vary. But whatever the changes, the generational cohort to which they will be applied remains stable in hierarchical order. For adult generations, affective support is generally seen as more continuously derived from members of parallel cohorts experiencing similar life span postures -- not from those in hierarchical orbit.

We suggest that this notion of parallel and hierarchical orbits, simply translated for functional use, offers a conceptual means to incorporate the two dynamics of personality functioning essential to the prevention -- or at least -- the reduction of intergenerational conflict; flexibility and clarity. These two attributes do indeed bear a functional relationship to one another, as the presence of either increases the potential for the second.

To the extent that we can objectively identify changing postures of a cohort rather than of specific individuals, and to the extent that these postures can be disconnected from traditionally defined roles and responsibilities, intergenerational stress and conflict born out of changing

times and unprecedented needs may be reduced. Actors and functions will be related to need and availability -- and disconnected from obsolete generational labels. Flexibility, the dynamic dimension necessary to a period of increasing and interlocking arenas of change, will be reinforced as functional.

We cannot return to obsolete models nor move back the clock to a less complicated society. Change is a constant with ever longer life spans and extended family relationships. We offer one model in recognition of time. We are but one score distant from the 21st century. The task should not identify the actor; but the actor must identify the task.

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